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NSC Declassification Review [EO 13526]

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by John Powers on 9/8/2018

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(U) ARGENTINA: NEW ARMY COMMANDER
WILL PROVIDE CONTINUITY

② PF

(C) Summary

③ Jtt P Arg

Lt. Gen. Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri's selection as Argentina's Army Commander (and therefore Junta member), coupled with other year-end shifts in the ranks of major generals, constitutes a victory for:

- political moderates, both civilian and military;
- retired Army Commander Lt. Gen. Roberto Viola and his presidential ambitions; and
- the infantry in its intraservice rivalry with the cavalry.

The influence on domestic and foreign policy that Galtieri will wield as commander of the nation's predominant armed service will favor continuation of policy lines established through the teamwork of Viola and President Jorge R. Videla.

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A Reputation for Quiet Competence

(C) Galtieri is the second successive commander to be selected directly by his predecessor (as Videla chose Viola in 1978) rather than by the President. The 53-year-old native of Buenos Aires Province is the first member of the engineer corps to hold the top army job. Galtieri is not known as a particularly forceful or charismatic figure. Rather, he has compiled a distinguished professional career that has included two sensitive corps

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commands since the March 1976 coup--Corps II in Rosario (October 1976-January 1979) and Corps I in Buenos Aires (January 1979-present). His record shows no major blunders. Rumors about a penchant for immoderate drinking and womanizing that gained some currency during the selection process appear to have been either carping or devoid of sufficient substance to disqualify him for the promotion.

(S/NF) While Galtieri is not a "political general" in the traditional Argentine sense, fellow officer Maj. Gen. Jose R. Villareal reportedly has expressed confidence in Galtieri's political talents and believes that the new commander will surprise the uninitiated with his competence. Galtieri has been willing to contact and listen to civilian politicians at his various postings around the country. While commanding the Seventh Infantry Brigade (Corrientes, 1973-74) he reportedly became friends with the Peronist Governor of Corrientes Province and he may have other Peronist connections.

(C) Support for Established Policies

In general political terms, Galtieri will support the policy lines established by the Videla-Viola tandem and espoused by the so-called moderates in the armed forces. Specifically, this means that the nation's key military officer will back:

- continued gradual improvement in the country's human rights performance; Galtieri's record while corps commander in both Rosario and Buenos Aires is encouraging in this area;
- a carefully staged military retreat from power within a reasonable timeframe and under conditions that will leave Argentina's traditional political framework largely intact; Galtieri is not among those who speak vaguely of democracy as an anachronism and a return to civilian rule in the 1990's, perhaps; and
- Viola as Videla's successor in the presidency.

Galtieri's views on economic policy and international relations are not well known. Assuming, however, that he is as close to Viola on economic questions as on others, Galtieri probably will lend guarded support to the strategy of Economy Minister Jose Martinez de Hoz. Viola is not an

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outspoken critic of the Minister's work in the manner of erstwhile Navy Commander Massera, but neither has he manifested Videla's unstinting and seemingly unquestioning public support of Martinez de Hoz. Occasionally Viola's remarks betray a politically adroit skepticism about the "social impact" of government economic policy, thereby implying a preference for policy adjustments that would favor worker interests.

With respect to foreign policy, Galtieri will play a significant formative role as a Junta member. Because the army is the nation's senior service, Galtieri's views will carry weight beyond the army's one-third share of Junta power when significant questions arise. The new commander has been notably quiet on international issues, but there is little reason to believe that he will seek major changes in Argentina's current policies. Thus it can be expected that:

- Politically, diplomatic activity will continue to reflect Argentina's perception of imperatives created by the human rights issue. Human rights will remain the central issue in bilateral relations with the US and the driving force behind efforts to obtain support in international forums from such otherwise unlikely partners as Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the non-aligned movement. The result is a foreign policy with a highly pragmatic, short-term focus.
- In the nuclear field, bilateral disagreements will persist as the Argentines pursue attainment of the most sophisticated facilities and technologies under the least stringent safeguards.
- Commercially, Argentina will attempt to exploit further its success in gaining access to markets in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. To do so, the Argentines may have to redress the enormous trade balance they enjoy with the Soviet bloc by making some concessions, perhaps in the form of fishing agreements or the introduction of Aeroflot service to Buenos Aires. They will be wary of ideological penetration and unlikely to purchase Soviet military equipment, but they will take steps to protect what have become valuable markets.
- Within the hemisphere, the resolution of differences over the coordination of hydroelectric projects has

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